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ABSTRACT

The National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE) Reading Initiative is a professional development process that engages teachers in a study of the theory, knowledge base, and practice of teaching reading. This work is accomplished: through long-term professional development; with the support and resources provided by an expert NCTE literacy consultant; with the support and participation of a principal or key administrator; and through affiliation with a national literacy organization and access to its professional resources. The NCTE Reading Initiative, which offers educators an intensive program based on effective classroom practice informed by research, is designed to give teachers the competence and confidence needed to teach all students to read successfully. This program overview is divided into the following sections: History; Acknowledgments; How to Use the Curriculum Experience and Role of the Consultant; Overview of the Reading Initiative; Consultant Resources; Why a National Reading Initiative?; Reading Initiative Strands; Time Frame (Year One; Years Two and Three); Meetings Schedule; Participants' Responsibilities; Elements of an Inquiry Process; and Reading Initiative Process and Experiences. An appendix contains a list of knowledge-base statements. (Contains 50 references.) (NKA)



NCTE

Reading Initiative

Overview

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The History of the NCTE Reading Initiative

The Reading Initiative is a professional development process that engages teachers in a study of the theory, knowledge base, and practice of teaching reading. This work is accomplished:

- Through *long-term professional development*
- With the *support and resources provided by an expert NCTE literacy consultant*
- With the *support and participation of a principal or key administrator*
- Through *affiliation with a national literacy organization and access to its professional resources*

The Reading Initiative is designed to give teachers the competence and confidence needed to teach all students to read successfully. It offers educators an intensive program based on effective classroom practice informed by research.



NCTE Reading Initiative

In 1997, NCTE staff and its volunteer leadership began to develop a range of experiences and engagements, as well as to identify key professional readings, to help serve this professional development effort. Since that time, the experiences found within the program have been through an extensive refinement process that includes use with the RI study group participants, modifications based on feedback from the consultants and participants, and the inclusion of additional engagements and professional reading.

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NCTE Reading Initiative

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Acknowledgments

The origin of the Reading Initiative, and the core of this professional development experience, was developed by Karen Smith, an Associate Executive Director at NCTE. In April 1997, in response to the stated need from NCTE members for such support, Karen submitted a proposal to NCTE's Executive Committee, requesting funding to pilot a developing set of engagements and readings in five different schools in the greater Chicago, Illinois, area. Linda Crafton served as her partner in conceptualizing the project and writing the Year One materials. The participants in the five schools provided valuable feedback. (The school names and participants are listed above.) Carolyn Burke, Jerome Harste, and Dorothy Menosky also served as a kind of "think tank" the following spring, an expanding group of literacy colleagues that we fondly refer to as the "Friends of the Reading Initiative." Following the use of the original materials, Linda Crafton and Karen Smith coordinated a revision effort impacted by feedback from Reading Initiative consultants Judy Kelly, Diane Stephens, Sarah Hudelson, and Kathleen Crawford.

The program's next evolution, during the 1998–99 school year, included the addition of Prisca Martens in the conceptualization, writing, and use of the Year Two experiences, and Carol Porter, who used the elementary materials as a starting point for the development of a secondary professional development experience. At this time the physical organization of the written and visual materials was also reorganized—providing a monthly materials file structure and a carrying tote. A professionally-designed logo was contracted from consultant Carlton Bruett, establishing a unique look for the curriculum materials and promotional components of the program.

In October 1999, the "Friends of the Reading Initiative" assembled once again. The group expanded to include secondary educators Randy Bomer, Mitzi Lewison, and new NCTE staff members Dak Allender, Kathy Egawa, and Leslie Froeschl, as well as one of the initial conceptual authors, Linda Crafton. The strengths and limitations of the evolving program were raised from multiple points of view. Simultaneous with revisiting the next evolution of changes, Diane Stephens had moved to the state of South Carolina, and, in partnership with NCTE member leadership in the area, proposed a statewide use of the project that would include 100 new consultants—literacy coaches in their model—each responsible for up to four study groups, with potential participation of 3,500 new teachers.

The scope of this effort led us to seek maximum feedback from all the consultants and participants who had affiliated with the Reading Initiative. Kathy Egawa, the current program administrator, and Karen Smith, the former administrator, composed a questionnaire that addressed both the major meeting components of the process, as well as the curricular experiences and readings. Program Manager Leslie Froeschl interviewed each consultant individually, compiling a wealth of data. The South Carolina Consultant team, each of whom had previously served as a consultant, was contracted to revise and reorganize the Year One materials, using the data as a guide. This team, led by Diane Stephens, includes Amy Donnelly, Janet Files, Susi Long, and Heidi Mills. Pam Wills serves as their collaborator contact at the South Carolina State Department of Education.

The conceptualization and writing for Year Three also made use of the data, leading us to consider a range of choices for individual school communities, called Inquiry Studies, to further develop the inquiry focus of the project and to heighten the consultants' role in determining the direction of the curriculum.



NCTE Reading Initiative

Re-envisioning a structure that shifted from monthly meeting agendas to one that flexibly calls for choice among focused, explicit experiences engaged the thinking of Carolyn Burke, Linda Crafton, Kathy Egawa, Prisca Martens, and Karen Smith. Individual Inquiry Studies are authored by individual author(s) using this structure, and collaboratively shaped by NCTE staff and colleagues.

How to Use the Curriculum Experiences and the Role of the Consultant

Flexible Use of Materials

These materials are designed to provide you as the consultant with a collection of engagements and resources with which you can make choices about experiences and combinations of experiences that will most effectively support the developing knowledge base of the teachers in your Reading Initiative group. You are encouraged to mix and match engagements and articles as you see fit, altering, adding, deleting, revising based on the needs of the learners in your school communities. You are encouraged to use this collection (and to add new engagements and articles and book chapters) in ways that seem most useful in your own situation.

Consultant as Co-Inquirer

The Reading Initiative builds from a model of professional development as a process of inquiry. Rather than serving as an expert, you have been chosen for your abilities as a teacher of teachers. NCTE counts on its consultants to set up the kinds of environments that support learning; often this includes your own learning, as well as that of the other educators in the group. When you work alongside a classroom teacher, for instance, the two of you may both be trying out new strategies that go well, or not so well. The intent of the Reading Initiative is that we learn from each such experience: what went successfully, what did not, what might be done differently next time. The same is true for the teachers whose classrooms you will visit via video footage. Rather than being promoted as models, they can be viewed as teachers like yourselves who have risked putting their teaching on tape as a means to start new curriculum conversations.

Further, on any given concept in this curriculum—miscue analysis or running records, for instance—you may be working with group members who have more information and experience than you yourself might have. From an inquiry perspective, this is an advantage, rather than a problem. The learning experiences that your groups will live together will move everyone to consider new ideas, new knowledge, and new ways to operate in their own teaching contexts. Embrace the breadth of knowledge within your groups as you begin this journey. Welcome!



Table of Contents

History.....	1
Acknowledgements	3
How to Use the Curriculum Experience and role of the Consultant.....	4
Overview of the Reading Initiative	7
Consultant Resources.....	7
Why a National Reading Initiative?.....	8
Conceptual Components of the NCTE Reading Initiative.....	11
School Change	12
Teacher Inquiry.....	13
Knowledge Base in Reading	14
Reading Initiative Strands	16
Time Frame	16
Year One	16
Years Two and Three.....	17
Introduction: Teacher Inquiry.....	17
Early Literacy or The Language Learning Process.....	17
Reading and Writing Connections	17
An Inquiry into Letters and Sounds: The Graphophonemic System in Use	18
Critical Literacy.....	18
Content and Reading.....	18
Supporting ESL/Bilingual Learners.....	18
Case Study of a Literacy Learner.....	18
Process Evaluation and Proficient Reading	19
Meetings Schedule	19
Participants' Responsibilities	20
Teachers	20
School Administrators	20
Parents	21
NCTE Consultants	22
Elements of an Inquiry Process.....	23
Initiating Engagements & Potential Resources.....	24
Engagements	24
Demonstrations	24
Invitations to Inquiry.....	25
Opportunities for Organizing & Sharing	25
Reflective Action Plan.....	26
Reading Initiative Process and Experiences	27
Case Inquiries.....	27
Reading/Learning Experiences	27
Professional Literature and Text Sets	27
Videotapes.....	28
Instructional and Theoretical Inquiry.....	28



NCTE Reading Initiative

Reflection.....	28
Teamwork	28
References.....	29
Appendix A.....	33
Knowledge-Base Statements.....	33



Overview of the Reading Initiative

Consultant Resources

Articles:

- Routman: "Teacher as Professional"
- Smith: "Demonstrations, Engagement and Sensitivity: A Revised Approach to Language Learning"

Transparencies:

- NCTE Reading Initiative Goals (T1)
- Conceptual Components of the NCTE Reading Initiative (T2)
- NCTE Reading Initiative Knowledge Base Statements (T3)
- NCTE Reading Initiative Inquiry/Learning Strands (T4)
- Issues Related to the NCTE Reading Initiative Inquiry/Learning Strands (T5)
- NCTE Reading Initiative Characteristics (T6)
- NCTE Reading Initiative Learning Principles (T7)
- NCTE Reading Initiative Learning Principles Diagram (T8)
- Elements of an Inquiry Process (T9)
- Inquiry-Based Evaluation: A Cycle of Valuing and Revaluing (T10)



Why a National Reading Initiative?

During the last 30 years, our knowledge of language, learning, and literacy has grown enormously. Research conducted by teachers and teacher educators in reading, linguistics, writing, and literary theory has yielded new insights into how children and adolescents learn to read and what instructional approaches work best in particular contexts. At the same time, the literacy demands for our entire country are higher than they have ever been. Today, reading involves previously unaddressed, or unnecessary, sophisticated navigation of cross-cultural, visual, and technological texts.

While we have the professional knowledge base both in reading and school reform to respond to these higher demands, most professional development efforts fail to do so. Recent research in school reform suggests that traditional professional development models (lecture, courses, brief inservice) result in little change in classroom instruction and learning. These traditional models are generally short-term and cursory. Consequently, they do not adequately support teachers' need to understand the complexities of the reading process and the significance of current literacy demands.

Effective professional development is long-term and in-depth. There are no "quick fixes," "short-order," or "one-size-fits-all" solutions to the complex processes of reading and reading instruction. Professional development in reading instruction must be based in specific classroom contexts but informed by research. In this way, professional development needs arise out of classroom instruction and drive professional development experiences. An additional fundamental part of sound professional development is the opportunity for teachers to engage each other during the process of their growth and learning. Shared knowledge strengthens what we know and increases the possibility of current insights taking root so that they have a chance to generate staying power.

Composition and mathematics teachers have created models of this type of professional development within their content areas. The writing movement started in 1974 as the Bay Area Writing Project. Its phenomenal and far-reaching influence has created a common language among teachers at all grade levels and in all content areas. The concepts of writing process, writing workshop, mini-lessons, and writing conferences now permeate teacher conversations and research around the country. What started as a conversation among concerned educators is now permanently housed in the National Writing Center at the University of California, Berkeley, at the Bread Loaf School of English in Vermont, and in satellite partnerships around the United States.



NCTE Reading Initiative

The math explosion came directly from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. They, too, carefully conceived professional development experiences and disseminated a fairly standardized model that emphasizes active problem-solving and mathematics situated in everyday experiences. These writing and math initiatives are sustained by networks of committed teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and professional organizations. Their success builds from the respect for classroom practitioners as professionals (Blau, 1998).

The NCTE Reading Initiative hopes to create a professional development model that will serve teachers as effectively as have the math and writing projects. The Reading Initiative provides both breadth and depth of knowledge and experience so teachers can approach their instruction and curricular decisions with confidence. Ultimately, the belief in the power of community, professional communities (large, medium, and small), and the need for many and diverse voices to help define and direct our work affirms the need for a strong national network of reading educators.



NCTE Reading Initiative

The NCTE Reading Initiative is an intensive, long-term professional development program carried out over several years through study groups of teachers and a key administrator. Teacher/administrator teams meet to conduct systematic inquiry into literacy research and practice and to discuss related issues and questions that arise in their classrooms. NCTE coaches or consultants join these groups to:

- analyze their own and others' work
- study videotapes and written case studies
- exchange insights with colleagues and consultants
- share instructional strategies and evaluation procedures
- read and discuss professional literature
- mentor others who participate in the project.

The NCTE Reading Initiative has seven major goals (see below and T1).

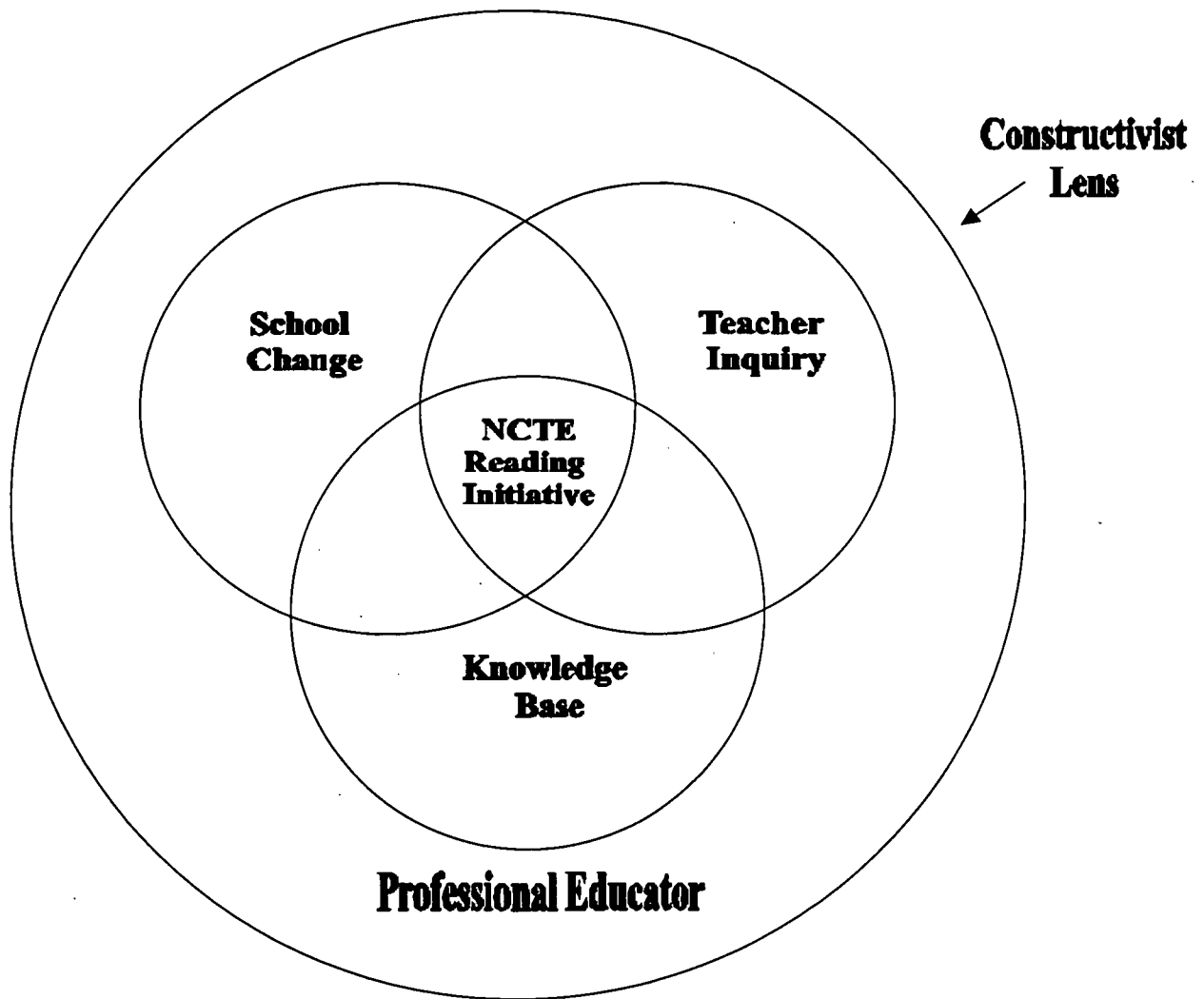
Reading Initiative Goals

1. To enhance teacher knowledge in relation to reading theory, reading research, and practice.
2. To encourage reflective practice through continuous examination of beliefs in relation to practice.
3. To explore with teachers the knowledge and the tools to assess, to create appropriate contexts, and to instruct in ways that nurture fluent, flexible, and engaged readers.
4. To engage teachers in personal and collaborative inquiry into reading and writing processes so that they may consider them complex and strategic problem-solving experiences.
5. To assist in the development of strategies that can be used for continuous inquiry and improvement of teaching practices.
6. To create a national network of teachers, principals, and consultants who have a shared knowledge base about the teaching and learning of reading and writing.
7. To develop structures within individual schools so that educators can engage in an independent and ongoing process of change.



Conceptual Components of the NCTE Reading Initiative

The NCTE Reading Initiative goals are grounded in insights from school change research; the learning potential of inquiry-based, constructivist theories for learners of all ages; and the transdisciplinary knowledge base on literacy and literacy instruction. These three conceptual components provide a powerful framework for the important work of the Initiative. (See below and T2.)





School Change

From its inception, the NCTE Reading Initiative has been informed by past progressive movements. That is the good news. What is daunting is that the well-documented and extraordinary success of many schools involved in past change movements has not continued to inform our nationwide efforts during the last half century. When change has occurred, such successes have been like fireworks—something to light up the night sky, but never enough to illuminate the entire educational sky. One reason we have succeeded in creating only small pockets of highly effective schools, Linda Darling-Hammond contends, is that “prior reform efforts have not been buttressed by the ongoing professional development needed to prepare teachers to teach in the complex ways that learner-centered practice demands” (1997, p. xv).

Successful school change must not focus solely on policy or structure, or expect a one-year turnaround in test scores [National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE), 1996, p. xvii]. Rather, change efforts must focus on school contexts. Educator Roland Barth focuses on “improving schools from within” (1990), noting that the relationships in a school are viewed as crucial to change as well as teacher satisfaction. Central to Barth’s concept of a healthy, effective school is the importance of community. In many schools, teachers teach behind closed doors both figuratively and literally. These teachers often work in schools where principals function primarily as policymakers and enforcers and teachers engage in far too little sharing of best practice, struggles, student successes, and the inevitable intrigue of teaching. Kaser, Kahn, and Crawford have discovered that teachers need a group of caring colleagues who meet together on a regular basis to attempt similar projects (1996).

In his inspiring book, *The Courage to Teach* (1998), Parker J. Palmer notes:

If we want to grow in our practice, we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn more about ourselves and our craft. The resources we need in order to grow as teachers are abundant within the community of colleagues. Good talk about good teaching is what we need—to enhance both our professional practice and the selfhood from which it comes. (p. xx)

The educational community has also learned that professional development must be embedded in actual teaching. Joyce and Showers report that only 5% of traditional professional development (workshops with lecture format, classes, conferences, reading books, and journal articles) ever results in classroom implementation (1995). However, they also found that the implementation of new ideas can skyrocket to over 90% when teachers have the opportunity to direct their learning and professional growth. Professional development in the teaching of literacy, particularly reading, has traditionally followed the same route: to reinforce current practices, rather than to change them. To reverse this trend, teachers, like all learners, need to identify questions that have personal and professional relevance, and then have the opportunity and support to explore them.



Teacher Inquiry

A substantial body of research from the 1960's convinced many educators that inquiry-based teaching produces qualitatively different results than more traditional, transmission-oriented pedagogy. Inquiry, as a way to focus curriculum and to think about pedagogy in general, however, has only recently taken hold. Linda Darling-Hammond's book on the creation of schools that work, *The Right to Learn* (1997), addresses both students' and teachers' right to engage in challenging work and purposeful inquiry.

The everyday stuff of teaching forms the bedrock for inquiry and professional development, illustrated by Jervis, Carr, Lockhart, and Rogers (1995) in their article, "Multiple Entries into Inquiry." Jervis points to the writing of narrative reports as an everyday teacher activity that was successfully transformed into professional inquiry in the early years of her teaching career. Her observations and reflections about each child revealed problems (and ultimately inquiries) in her teaching. At that time, the inquiries were an individual endeavor; later she experienced the power of a collaborative teaching and learning community. Jervis explains that her teaching changed slowly, particularly through the close observation of individual children. She shares the following example:

I remember vividly one milestone in my change. It was a lesson I taught to my fourth-grade students, who had been estimating the number of peas and corn and rice in jars. It was a disastrous attempt to teach the whole class how to average large numbers. In my teaching nightmares, I can still feel my stomach churn as I recreate the individual faces tuning out one by one as the lesson I understood so well failed to make sense to the 25 children who began with 25 different understandings of average and 25 different ways of taking in new information. That lesson was the last whole-group lesson I ever taught with the expectation that what I had in my head could be transferred ready-made into the heads of children. (p. 251)

Teachers themselves must become learners again, through research embedded in everyday practice, to significantly change teaching and learning. Although we continue to develop the key elements of such research, it is clear that teacher inquiry is a powerful form of professional development that offers a depth and breadth of change not seen in other models.

Teaching as inquiry focuses more on the process of asking questions than of finding solutions. Johnston and Wilder describe the frustration one group of teachers felt about giving grades that did not reflect their students' literacy learning (1992). During a brainstorming session, the teachers generated as many alternatives as they could for dealing with this problem. These ideas were not solutions, but questions to be investigated. To answer them, these Orange County, Florida teachers formed study groups in which "every member was responsible for teaching and learning, for choosing topics that interested and challenged them, and for making curriculum decisions based on the results of their study" (1992, p. 628).



Further, in these school-based study groups, principals learned alongside teachers. One impressive result of this effort was that many teachers expressed opinions about curriculum for the first time, articulating the beliefs that directly informed their instruction.

Knowledge Base in Reading

We have come a long way in our knowledge of reading in the past 30 years. From a 1960's view of reading as a simple perceptual process to a twenty-first century understanding of reading as a complex, orchestrated act of personal and social/cultural meaning-making, we now have a broad-based transdisciplinary perspective on reading that can inform instruction in specific ways. However, we still have miles to go. While our knowledge base has expanded enormously, so has our challenge. Braunger and Lewis (1997) point to a "higher stakes literacy" that Miles Myers terms "critical/translation." As the demands of our lives increase on every front, so does the literacy that will be required to function in the twenty-first century. It is no longer enough to acquire a basic level of reading and writing. Rather, all students must be able to engage in complex manipulations and applications of language and thought previously required of only a few.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future has called for the restructuring of the teaching profession. Part of that restructuring includes an increase in teacher knowledge. Clearly, it has never been more imperative for teachers to command an extensive knowledge base in language, literacy, and learning. The Reading Initiative is predicated on the belief that, under the right conditions, and with broad-based knowledge, we can teach powerfully enough to impact most, if not all, students.

The Reading Initiative is designed to support teachers' development of understandings based upon scholarship that demonstrates the linguistic, cognitive, social, cultural, and political nature of reading. These understandings are developed as teachers proceed through an extended process of probing the issues and questions embedded in their practice. Braunger and Lewis (1997) note that "the lenses of different research traditions have helped us see a fuller picture of reading. Cognitive psychology, educational anthropology, linguistics, and sociology have all contributed to the knowledge base about reading, its acquisition, and its processes" (Pearson & Stephens, 1994).

The following knowledge-base statements draw from research in various fields of study (see also T3). Please note that several of the statements are drawn directly from Braunger and Lewis' extensive distillation of research in *Building a Knowledge Base in Reading*.



NCTE Reading Initiative Knowledge-Base Statements

1. Reading is an act of language. It is always about meaning and communication.
2. Reading is a construction of meaning from text. It is an active, cognitive, social, cultural, and affective process.
3. Making sense of print involves four systems: semantic, syntactic, graphophonic, and pragmatic.
4. While readers vary in their use of strategies and cues, the proficient reading process is the same for all readers.
5. Reading and learning to read are fundamentally social.
6. Reading is a complex problem-solving process.
7. Readers learn successful reading strategies in the context of real reading.
8. Background knowledge and prior experience shape a reader's comprehension.
9. Reading and writing are inextricably connected. Development in one area influences development in the other.
10. Environments rich in literacy experiences, resources, and models facilitate reading development.
11. Readers learn best when teachers are knowledgeable about the reading process and the conditions that influence its development.
12. Reading is a lifelong process.

For detailed definitions of these twelve knowledge-base statements, see Appendix A.



Reading Initiative Strands

With the conceptual framework discussed above in mind, we developed a structural framework for the NCTE Reading Initiative based on four major inquiry/learning strands (see below, T4, and T5).

Personal Literacy

Focused observations and analysis by each participant of his/her own reading processes

Close Observation

Focused observations and analysis of students as readers

Supportive Literacy Contexts

Exploration and development of contexts that support and encourage readers

Professional Culture

Exploration and development of procedures and contexts that encourage collegiality

Each Reading Initiative experience is designed to engage participants in activities that encourage exploration of one or more of these strands. Consultant decisions and individual school inquiries will determine what content and experiences are highlighted. Extensions and invitations will continue these explorations in the classroom and at subsequent team meetings.

Time Frame

Each year the Initiative focuses on different issues:

Year One

- Introduces participants to the Reading Initiative as a professional learning process;
- Explores the language learning process of young children, and
- Considers the kinds of experiences and kinds of classrooms that support literacy learning.

During the first year, participants inquire into the nature of their own reading process by engaging in reading/learning experiences that highlight key phenomena in reading. They also reflect on their own processes in a range of contexts. These understandings are then taken into the classroom as teachers observe and explore the conditions and contexts that support developing readers and writers. Experiences are extended and deepened through close observations and the use of related professional literature, videotapes, and meetings with the



NCTE Reading Initiative

consultant. Participants are asked to continuously explore ways to take responsibility for individual pedagogical change while considering what it means to be supportive colleagues helping others examine their own theory/practice relationships.

Years Two and Three

Years Two and Three of the Reading Initiative offers educators the opportunity to work in more depth with issues of concern or interest to their own teaching lives. Extensive interviews with NCTE Reading Initiative consultants helped identify a range of interests and these are being developed into Inquiry Studies. *Each site is invited to select three of these studies for its year's work.* An introductory unit will frame the beginning of the year. Some sites may also elect to continue incomplete work from Years One and Two during this third year.

Introduction: Teacher Inquiry

Why is it important for teachers to be learners?

- Living a 24 hour inquiry
- *Why inquiry* among the range of learning theories?
- What are the elements of inquiry-based learning?
- What tools might teachers use to learn from their practice?
- What counts as data?
- How do we analyze data?
- Creating a description of the conditions that support teacher inquiry

Early Literacy or The Language Learning Process

What do we know about readers and writers from the earliest ages?

- How do young children acquire language?
- What early literacy behaviors can we recognize?
- What support can families and schools provide?

Literacy Learning as a Meaning-Making, Strategy-Based Process

Reading and Writing Connections

What do we need to know about reading and writing?

- Looking closely at literacy classrooms
- Thinking and working as readers and writers--living the process
- Creating classrooms that support reading and writing
- Assessment strategies woven throughout: Miscue Analysis, Running Records, Hypothesis-Test Process



An Inquiry into Letters and Sounds: The Graphophonemic System in Use

What is the role of the instructional term **phonics** in the reading process of an alphabetic language?

- What is the relationship between sounds and letters?
- What about dialects?
- Reading proceeds from right to left as much as it proceeds from left to right.
- What does this mean for classroom practice?

Critical Literacy

What do we learn when we read?

- How does what we read shape what we know?
- Whose stories are told? Whose are not included?
- What does it mean to read critically?
- How can teachers add a critical edge to their curricula?

Content and Reading

How can we help developing readers make meaning? The process of reading always involves collecting and organizing information and understandings.

- What is the role of prior knowledge?
- What is the role of the reader's personal questions and interests?
- What about the author's vision, knowledge and experience?
- Considering text features
- The demands of various genre

Supporting ESL/Bilingual Learners

Learning a language is learning a culture. How are language and thought are related?

- How can knowledge of one language support the learning of another?
- Issues and miscues in second language learning are predictable based on what we know about the two languages involved.
- What program and curriculum support is key?

Case Study of a Literacy Learner

After participants observe themselves closely to understand their personal literacy, they take an in-depth look at one literacy learner. Understanding one's personal literacy and close observation of one reader in many contexts can dramatically change perceptions of process and definitions of what it means to be literate.

- Case inquiries are supported by case materials such as interviews, observations, oral reading data, written responses, and attitude surveys.
- These tools are systematically introduced so that study group members can gather observational information in an effort to understand the complexities of the individual reading process.
- Video cases are also used so teachers can observe and think together about one reader.



Process Evaluation and Proficient Reading

- How can teachers observe key dimensions of the reading process and use authentic assessments (miscue analysis, retellings, students' self-evaluations, and retrospective miscue) to make effective instructional decisions?

(Some of this information could be incorporated in the case study, and a more complex study organized for a subsequent choice.)

Meetings Schedule

A meeting schedule for each year of the Initiative might look like this:

Regular Meetings: Each team works out a schedule of meetings either weekly or bi-monthly. These meetings are most often held after school and last for two hours. Consultants use NCTE Professional Development materials and the team's ongoing needs and inquiries to develop the agenda.

Semiannually: November and March meetings are four-hour regional workshops that provide opportunities for teams from different schools to share and collaborate on their ideas and experiences.

Yearly: A two-day Summer Institute is held each year in the late summer to prepare the participants for the coming year.



Participants' Responsibilities

Teachers

The NCTE Reading Initiative process produces a kind of recurring rhythm: patterns of questioning, experimenting, observing, reading, talking, reflecting, and refining theory and practice ebb and flow to form a pattern that defines individual school teams. When teachers enter the NCTE Reading Initiative, they are clear on their responsibilities to it and to one another. While the responsibilities are weighty, the professional payoff is enormous. The opportunity to think and talk and look deeply into a complex teaching issue is something most teachers crave throughout their professional lives.

Participants will be asked to take on multiple professional issues simultaneously, including reading professional literature, scrutinizing their own practice and its impact on student success, trying new approaches to teaching, communicating openly with colleagues and school administrators about their students and their teaching practices, and mentoring other teachers.

School Administrators

The involvement of school administrators is a unique feature of the Initiative and essential to the program's success. If teachers are to take risks and implement curricular changes consistent with their developing knowledge of reading, they must feel confident that the school administration is knowledgeable of and supports these endeavors. In addition to the above teacher responsibilities, administrators will have the added task of creating school environments that encourage innovation and change. Administrators are, first and foremost, equal members and active participants in the study of reading, bringing their own interests, ideas, and curiosities about reading and supporting teachers in their learning pursuits. Like other team members, they will systematically pursue their own inquiries.

Tom Eber, principal of South School in Des Plaines, Illinois, was a member of one of the first Initiative teams. He actively embraced both the exploration of reading process and his role in helping to create a school culture that values ongoing teacher learning:

I knew from the beginning that I wanted to be an authentic participant—not a “member” who steers and controls. In one of our recent journal entries, a team member mentioned how important it was to her that I had videotaped and shared—that it set a tone. But I had genuinely come with many questions about reading and many doubts. I responded back that I was grateful for her comments but it was the group that made it possible for me to make my questions public, possible for me to explore my wonderings . . . and my fears. I made the decision to videotape because I wanted to get the wisdom of the group. (1998)



NCTE Reading Initiative

The creation of an enduring collegial atmosphere in a school is often closely related to how administrators define their roles. Because every school structure is unique, each administrator and team are faced with the challenge of creating the most supportive environment within their individual context.

Administrators also play a key communication role in the Initiative. Along with teachers, they will be encouraged to:

- devise ways for every participant to engage in frequent talk and sharing;
- help teachers who are not currently part of an Initiative team feel connected to the change process;
- educate parents about the work of the Initiative;
- keep the school board and other district administrators apprised of the professional development progress; and
- share their experiences and insights at NCTE conventions or in other venues.

As teachers and administrators investigate questions and issues, they are asked to consider publishing what they have learned. Having multiple avenues for sharing professional knowledge recognizes the relationship between reflecting on and articulating what constitutes learned and improved practice. However, few of our nation's teachers and principals make public their understandings about their important work. When educators do write or speak, it is often because they live in an environment that values, encourages, and rewards the sharing of professional knowledge. The NCTE Reading Initiative seeks to create the kind of learning organization that not only values teacher knowledge but also demonstrates to teachers that what they know is critical to the health and progress of the profession. In addition to sharing at team meetings, there are other ways of exchanging ideas about reading and systemic change available to teachers and administrators involved in the Initiative: NCTE Reading Initiative Web site, Saturday seminars, summer institutes, NCTE conferences, and listservs.

Parents

Given the importance of parents in advancing children's literacy, parental involvement in the project is also vital. Schools involved in the Reading Initiative are urged to involve parents through outreach activities such as workshops and newsletters. The most important objectives here are to help parents understand what it means to be an active and successful reader, how to support their children's strengths and address their difficulties as readers, and how to provide a home environment that nurtures literacy development.



NCTE Consultants

Based on Vygotsky's notion of a more experienced "other," NCTE consultants in the Reading Initiative are viewed as indispensable agents of change. They are selected based on a number of factors:

- extensive experience mentoring adults and facilitating professional dialogue;
- known expertise in the field of reading and reading research consistent with NCTE and Initiative goals and philosophies;
- in-depth knowledge of language development theory, practice, and research;
- the ability to work with the educational change process in a knowledgeable and humane way; and
- geographic considerations.

Consultants bring all of this to bear as they learn from the teams what is needed to keep the professional development momentum going as they observe the team process. They are in the school to respond to issues and questions, to provide alternative perspectives, to seek out appropriate professional materials, to structure authentic reading and reflective experiences, and to initiate participants in the use of a range of observational tools. But consultants are also in schools in a learning capacity: first, to learn from the teams so they can respond to what matters to them and, second, to learn how they can most effectively encourage growth in team settings. In fact, Reading Initiative consultants may not always be experts in the areas being addressed. But they are selected for their ability to create the learning environment that will support the inquiry of all involved. Consultant work is supported primarily by the NCTE Reading Initiative Professional Development Materials, which outline a range of experiences, reflective methods, and professional literature that they can draw from to customize each school experience.

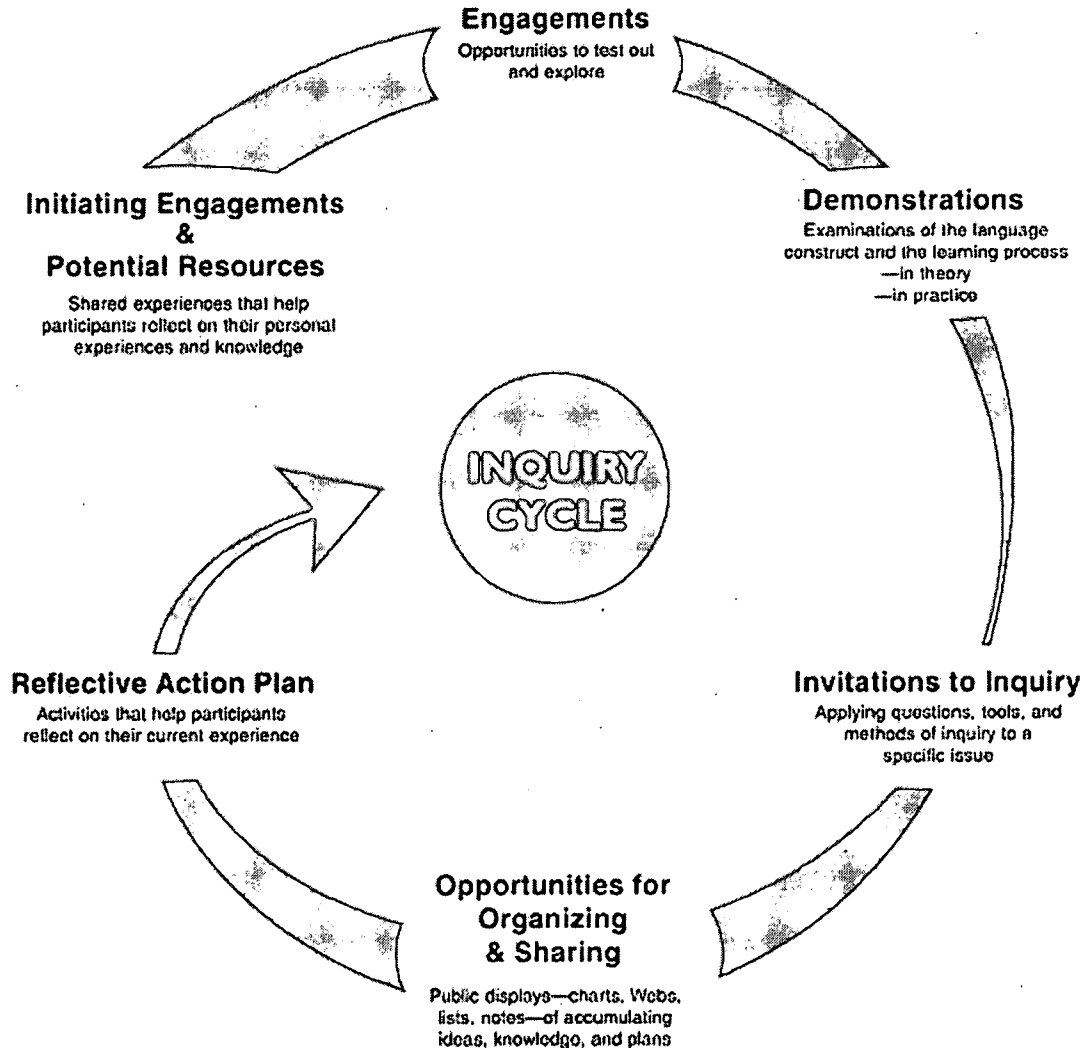
Sheridan Blau describes the role of the consultant this way, "The role of specialists is to serve as a resource for affiliated teachers and to help teachers frame and ground their own best practices within larger theoretical contexts and bodies of research" (March, 1998). Ultimately, being a consultant in the Initiative means finding ways to encourage and develop reflective practice in reading and helping teachers become informed decision makers in their classrooms as they pursue individual and collaborative inquiries into process and instruction.

Like all worthwhile endeavors, the Initiative is what participants make of it. We stress throughout the Initiative that the experience is about the participants. Once they commit the time, effort, peer support, and so on, they will meet their high expectations.



Elements of an Inquiry Process

Here is one visual representation of the inquiry process in which we will be engaged. The elements are described briefly below. Although they are listed as separate elements, learners recognize that they are often interchangeable or overlapping. (See also T9.)





Initiating Engagements & Potential Resources

Shared experiences that help participants reflect on their personal experiences and knowledge as the group predicts the direction of the study, and the set of resources with which the study begins.

From alternate models of learning, we might call this an *introduction*. As orchestrators of an inquiry process, however, our initial meetings with learners both frame the study, as well as help learners recognize what they already know and what they think they want to know. This is accomplished in many ways: through children's literature read aloud, through a lived experience together, maybe through the use of a video clip. This holds true for both the beginning of a particular "chunk" of curriculum, as well as at the beginning of each meeting of a study group.

A set of professional articles and book chapters is included with each inquiry study, as well as video footage of classrooms. Further, we encourage your group to contribute to four ongoing collections:

- 1) questions you have about the study, for instance, what questions do you have about early literacy?
- 2) three resources for a group-created text set, including books, journals, articles in the popular press, reading/writing developmental continua,
- 3) a graffiti board collection of all related words and phrases that come to mind as you begin the study, and
- 4) a list of the possible ways you could study a particular topic, for instance, how could we study ourselves as literacy learners and users?

Understanding the importance of this list and completing the tasks will be accomplished over time. Its primary function is to actively involve you in your own learning. To further understand the place of learning and professional reading in the lives of educators, see the book chapter by Regie Routman, "Teacher as Professional," in the Article Packet.

Engagements

Opportunities to test out and explore multiple perspectives on the language process.

Engagements are the heart of this learning process. Together you will live many of the reading and writing experiences you will later use with younger learners. You will participate in literature discussion groups, both with professional readings and with children's books. You will write, revise, and edit. You will watch videos and think about the implications for your own teaching.

Demonstrations

Examinations of the language construct and the learning process, both theoretical and in practice.

Purposeful demonstrations are most often provided by teachers or parents. For us as educators, they are referred to by several names: mini-lessons, strategy lessons, direct teaching, or demonstrations. Demonstrations highlight a key component of language learning, based on



teacher knowledge of what would be supportive of the learning of the group (or of small groups), and the learners go back to work. From an inquiry perspective, demonstrations are not seen as *modeling*, or behavior to be replicated; rather, demonstrations provide information or an enactment of that information as one of multiple possibilities. For instance, you will learn about three models of language learning: subskills, skills, and holistic. We have found these to be helpful representations of how educators structure language curriculum. Yet, these are not the sole representations available among all language researchers. Likewise, you will watch video clips of several students providing tours of their classrooms. Although elements of each may be alike, there will also be differences. Demonstrations support learners in creating their own enactments of what has been learned.

Invitations to Inquiry

Applying questions, tools, and methods of inquiry to a specific issue: data collection tools; data analysis.

Frequently an engagement or demonstration will launch learners into an inquiry process, either formally or informally. For instance, as you learn about the Hypothesis-Test Process, you will use this new way of thinking to watch learners and make hypotheses about the behaviors you see. This is a challenging process, as many people who watch learners assess judgments—*he's so lazy; she doesn't like to read; he works so hard*. It becomes an inquiry to state what you see: *Tom came to the word bear in a sentence. He stopped and looked at me. When I didn't provide help, he skipped the word and went on; When Tiffany, a fourth grader, was asked to bring a book to read to me, she selected Brown Bear, Brown Bear; and then create opportunities to test out hypotheses like: Tiffany does not yet read chapter books; or Tiffany selected the book she reads aloud to her little brother.*

Needless to say, an inquiry-based professional development process will offer us all many opportunities to inquire!

Opportunities for Organizing & Sharing

Public displays—charts, Webs, lists, notes—of accumulating ideas, knowledge, and plans

During this learning process, we will be compiling ideas, questions, and new plans. We encourage you to keep your own professional journal, as well as to contribute to the informal public documents your group creates. And we also encourage you not to throw these away, no matter how informal or inconsequential they might seem. Each will provide a partial documentation of the learning process and contribute to our research efforts.



Reflective Action Plan

Activities that help the participants reflect on their current experience and opinions in constructing their understanding of the unit of study and subsequent new practice.

Last, as learners move through the inquiry process, literally or metaphorically, we consider our new learning and reposition ourselves for new action and learning. We will make some of those plans together: *What does this new knowledge mean for how we organize our curriculum and the physical spaces in our classrooms? What additional ways will we now assess the learning of our students? How does that assessment overlap with state standards?* Or, you and your colleagues may talk on your own and develop some plans for tomorrow. Other ideas you might place on hold. We recognize that it is this reflective stance that supports those decisions.



Reading Initiative Process and Experiences

The inquiry process threads through the entire NCTE Reading Initiative. Embedded in the teaching of reading are issues, questions, and beliefs about the process, the learner, and the curriculum. Uncovering these abstractions is necessary to focus on learning and to allow for reexamination of existing systems. The following multiple inquiries help Initiative participants make explicit assumptions about the teaching and learning of reading and, at the same time, assist them in the strengthening and deepening of their existing knowledge base.

Case Inquiries

Numerous case inquiries are recommended throughout the three years of the Initiative. Participants observe themselves closely to understand their personal literacy, then they take an in-depth look at one reader, and they look closely at the whole class. Understanding one's personal literacy and close observation of one reader in many contexts can dramatically change perceptions of process and definitions of what it means to be literate. These case inquiries are supported by case materials such as interviews, observations, oral reading data, written responses, and attitude surveys. These are systematically introduced to teachers so that they can gather observational information in an effort to understand the complexities of the individual reading process. Video cases are also used so teachers can observe and think together about one reader.

Reading/Learning Experiences

From the first day of the Summer Institute and throughout the three years of the Initiative, teachers are asked to inquire into their individual and social constructions of meaning by reading and reflecting on their own reading process. Many of the following reading/learning experiences are instructional procedures that participants can experience themselves and then take back to their classrooms to explore with their students.

Professional Literature and Text Sets

NCTE and the consultants provide professional literature and Text Sets to support individual and group explorations. Teams read, discuss, and critique these topically-related materials in an effort to expand and deepen their understanding of issues related to theory, research and practice and, specifically, to seek perspectives on curricular wonderings. One of the consultants' most critical roles is seeking out and matching professional literature to the needs of individual team members.



Videotapes

Consultants use videotapes of students and teachers in a variety of instructional settings to sharpen observation skills, to revisit issues and explore multiple perspectives about process and pedagogy, and to encourage a strong link between assessment and instruction. While several videotapes are recommended throughout the three-year project, tapes are used selectively by Initiative consultants according to need and ongoing inquiries. Videotapes can be used individually or as part of an identified Text Set.

Instructional and Theoretical Inquiry

Instructional and theoretical inquiry allows team members to test hypotheses and explore the interrelationships among linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and social variables. With the consultant, teams are challenged at each meeting to identify an action plan to implement, reflect on, and share with peers. Challenges may relate to theoretical and/or process questions or particular instructional strategies or curricular components such as sustained silent reading or literature discussion.

Reflection

Reflection, both written and spoken, is recommended to achieve ongoing change and learning. Reflection encourages participants to stand back from their Initiative experiences, to examine their practice in relation to new insights and current research, to consider what underlying processes are supported by instruction, and ask: "What beliefs guide the decisions I've made in this context?" "What have I learned?" "What new questions and tensions can I now identify?"

Teamwork

From the first day of the Reading Initiative, participants focus on the ongoing process of community development and team building. Teams are apprised of the stages that they are likely to go through as they are becoming a community of learners who can engage in the hard thinking required of individual and collaborative inquiry. Consultants in the Initiative are well-schooled in the notion of community and its critical value to social learning. They understand that it is an ongoing process that must be nourished throughout the life of a group. Community can be built in many ways but cannot be created without shared experience.



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Appendix A

Knowledge-Base Statements

1. Reading is an act of language. It is always about meaning and communication.

Language is expressed in multiple ways: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing. Meaning and communication are at the heart of all of these communication efforts. Even the youngest language user makes that wonderful discovery as parents communicate whole meanings and strain to hear the meaning in their children's early speech. A baby's introduction to language comes in a complex whole with form and grammar and meaning operating at the same time. Early language research shows that parents maintain a steady stream of speech as they care for their children and introduce them to a wide, new world. This produces a rich core of language and conceptual information that learners bring to bear as they read and learn from print. Classrooms must honor the fundamental communicative nature of language when using reading to think and explore the world.

2. Reading is a construction of meaning from text. It is an active, cognitive, social, cultural, and affective process (adapted from Braunger & Lewis, p. 28).

Reading is not a passive act in which readers receive an author's message. Active readers are at the center of the process; it is their cognitive and linguistic efforts that result in personal constructions of meaning as they interact with a text. Rosenblatt (1978) called this event a transaction. Each transaction is unique because readers have different backgrounds, experiences, and purposes for reading. This understanding teaches us to expect variation in comprehension and readers' responses.

3. Making sense of print involves four systems: semantic, syntactic, graphophonic, and pragmatic.

Reading is a problem-solving process focused on both the author's message and the reader's personal and sociocultural interpretation. It is clearly a complicated endeavor. Usually with little conscious awareness, readers access and orchestrate cues from multiple systems simultaneously to achieve understanding. Four major cueing systems are involved when reading: semantic, syntactic, graphophonic, and pragmatic. Each system has its function and its place in relation to the other systems, and all must be available for comprehension to occur (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987).

The **semantic** system is at the core of the reading process. Without it, reading would be purposeless nonsense. The semantic system is far more than word meanings. It is a network of conceptual knowledge developed through language and real-world experience, with meaning shaped by readers' backgrounds.



The **syntactic**, or grammatical system, is the structure of language and the interrelationships of words, sentences, and paragraphs. Young children possess a significant store of syntactic knowledge developed through oral language and listening to books.

The **graphophonic** system refers to the sound/symbol knowledge that readers have about the marks on a page. In an alphabetic system like English, graphophonics includes the sounds of oral language (phonology) and spelling (orthography) and the complex relationship between the two. Knowledge of graphophonics is largely a result of experience and intuited understandings (Allington, 1997) and is supported by authentic reading and writing experiences as well as language play activities. While recent research points to the role that phonemic awareness plays in reading development (Adams, 1990; Juel, 1991), Braunger and Lewis point out that the evidence suggests that phonemic awareness is “a necessary but not sufficient condition” for reading development (p. 42).

The **pragmatic** system takes into account the context in which language occurs. Language does not exist outside of a particular context. In fact, the other three cueing systems just described each depend on context to determine how they are used and the relationships among them. To understand and better use the pragmatics unique to each type of written material, students must have opportunities to experience a range of texts.

4. While readers vary in their use of strategies and cues, the proficient reading process is the same for all readers.

Readers of all ages engage in the same process of making sense as they interact with print. Using background knowledge and experience to guide them, they use language cues and problem-solving strategies to construct meaning. Teachers must have a clear understanding of this proficient reading process if they are to move all students toward that goal. Research into reading process such as miscue analysis and running records (Clay, 1972; Goodman, 1965) continues to provide insight into effective reading strategies. All fluent readers use the strategies of predicting and confirming. These strategies should be highlighted in the earliest reading instruction. Other strategies that are critical to comprehension include monitoring, distinguishing significant information in narrative, and questioning (Cooper, 1993; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Pearson, 1993).

5. Reading and learning to read are fundamentally social.

A reader selects a novel from the shelves of the fiction section in the local library and begins a conversation with the author. A mother holds her one-year-old in her lap and reads *Good Night Moon*, labeling pictures as she goes and reminding her daughter that the rocking chair in the book is like the one they are sitting in. A couple spends a Sunday morning reading the newspaper, intermittently saying: “Listen to this!” Whether alone or with another person or a group of people, reading is a social activity and thought is collective by nature.



Vygotsky has helped us understand the notion of social intelligence and how social interactions drive learning processes (1978). Extending from Vygotsky's theories, Bruner (1975) and Applebee and Langer (1983) describe the concept of scaffolding in which a more experienced "other" supports and nudges a learner forward.

The social component of reading takes at least two dominant forms: discussion of ideas and metacognitive discussions of process and strategies. These discussions can result in greater control and understanding of reading as a tool for learning.

6. Reading is a complex thinking process.

Not so long ago the dominant view of reading was one of decoding and linearity. If a reader could successfully decode a word, some assumed there was instant access to meaning. As each word was decoded, some thought one meaning could be added to the other, resulting in comprehension of an entire text. In other words, the parts added up to the whole. But reading is neither simple decoding nor is it an additive process. Our language is filled with examples that immediately dispel both assumptions: a blind Venetian is not the same as a Venetian blind and my ability to decode the word "bow" doesn't tell me if I'm searching for a meaning related to arrows or to meeting the queen. But knowing the correct meaning of one word doesn't account for the world of thought and response that can occur while reading a biography about Princess Diana or a newspaper article about the Israelis relinquishing land on the West Bank. A reader can understand prose on a literal level and, at the same time, be launched into a reevaluation of life and relationships (for example, consider Jess and Leslie in Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*, 1977). Reading is a complex act of thought that happens on many levels simultaneously.

7. Readers learn successful reading strategies in the context of real reading (Braunger & Lewis, p. 45).

Reading a novel on the beach to experience the pleasure of getting lost in a good story is quite different from the demands placed on a reader reading a newspaper to update knowledge of the current political scene. Reading strategies vary as reading contexts and purposes vary. Readers learn how to orchestrate the key dimensions of different reading processes as they read authentic texts for authentic purposes. Literacy use is authentic when the reader has personal intent related to the literacy event (Edelsky & Smith, 1984). This notion of strategy development and authenticity reminds us that "school is not for getting ready to do the real stuff of life sometime in the distant future; it is for doing real things, for real audiences, and for ourselves, right now" (Crafton, 1991).

Reading can be considered an extended process (Crafton, 1982) during which a reader utilizes cues to construct meaning before, during, and after reading (Sweet, 1993). Which cues are tapped depends on text structure, reader familiarity with content, author, organization, purpose for reading, self-monitoring, etc.



8. Background knowledge and prior experience shape a reader's comprehension.

On the way home from summer camp one day, a preschooler told her mother that their counselor had read *Little Red Riding Hood* to them as part of "Fairy Tale Week." "What do you think that story is about?" her mother asked. A pause, a sigh, a sideways glance: "I think it's about sharing . . . especially when somebody's sick." This was hardly the common adult interpretation about not talking to strangers, but it was an interpretation nonetheless. Like all interpretations, it is based on background knowledge, prior experience, and the socio-cultural context in which this reader participates.

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, many reading researchers focused on the reader and his/her contribution to the reading process. Their work confirmed the active role of the reader as described by Rosenblatt (1938). Their work on schema theory and Rosenblatt's work on the role of the reader changed our view of reading and of readers. Young readers do not offer a different interpretation of what they hear/read because they don't "get it." They do so because their experiential worlds are different. This basic insight into comprehension processes reminds us to expect, honor, and even encourage variation in interpretation. Classrooms must provide ongoing opportunities for students to expand background knowledge through a range of experiences and discussions. The more students read and write, the more their background knowledge grows (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Sweet, 1993).

9. Reading and writing are inextricably connected. Development in one influences development in the other.

In classrooms around the country, teachers have made efforts to dissolve the traditional barriers that have separated reading from writing and writing from reading. Teachers are providing more opportunities for students to write their own texts, to read others, and to think about how knowledge in one can promote meaning construction in the other. Curricular changes that bring reading and writing closer together are based on solid understandings of the interrelationships among literacy processes: We learn to read by reading and write by writing, but we also learn to read by writing and to write by reading (Burke, 1987; Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstik, 1995; Smith, 1988).

Tierney & Shanahan (1991) report that writing impacts reading performance, and reading influences how writers write. This research brings to it a theoretical lens that recognizes reading and writing as similar acts of meaning construction (Pearson & Tierney, 1984; Squire, 1983). The basic strategies in writing are the same strategies readers use to comprehend: predicting, confirming, integrating (Goodman, 1983). As in reading, prediction occurs in writing on a number of different fronts at the same time. Writers predict globally what they would like their messages to be and, then, as they are writing, they predict on a smaller linguistic scale; that is, they anticipate what they will say next and how they will say it. Effective writers always keep the larger picture in mind as they are dealing with focal predictions. Confirming in writing relates to making sense. Writers monitor their writing to see if it makes sense to them and to their intended audiences. Just as readers use confirmation to determine whether they should



continue reading, or stop and reread or rethink, writers use confirming strategies to decide when to keep writing and when to stop, rethink, and revise. Integrating this process is based on how authors perceive readers' backgrounds, beliefs, and interests and on how well they can integrate those with their own to accomplish their intended purposes.

Emergent literacy research also documents the reading/writing relationship. We know, for example, that in the early stages of reading, the act of writing helps to shape children's understanding of text (NCTE & IRA, 1996). Crafton (1988) summarizes major insights we have about early reading and writing development based on an emergent literacy perspective (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Goodman, 1983; Hall, 1987; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Taylor, 1983):

- Very young children know a great deal about being literate. They expect print, theirs and others, to make sense.
- Knowledge about reading and writing is generated through participation in meaningful activities.
- Understanding about reading/writing develops as children use reading/writing for everyday purposes.
- Children develop ideas about reading and writing as they interact with others.
- Even though children's reading/writing efforts look different than those of adults', they are intentional acts of meaning construction and should be treated as such.
- Risk-taking and approximation are central to early language development.
- Aspects of reading and writing (sound/symbol relationships, grammar, meaning, context) do not develop in isolation; rather, they develop on a number of different fronts at the same time as readers/writers attempt to make form and meaning work together (Crafton, 1988, pp. 86–87).

10. Environments rich in literacy experiences, resources, and models facilitate reading development (Braunger & Lewis, p. 32).

Whether at home or at school, rich literacy environments make the critical developmental difference. Students who are surrounded by books, read to on a regular basis, and let in on the invisible "how-tos" of reading have a much better chance of succeeding than learners who are not.

Vygotsky (1978) provides the theoretical underpinnings for the indispensable learning value of less experienced readers interacting with expert ones. When classrooms are viewed as supportive communities like the extended ones in which students live, teachers are challenged to understand students' home language and their "ways with words" (Heath, 1983).



11. Readers learn best when teachers are knowledgeable about the reading process and the conditions that influence its development.

Knowledgeable teachers are at the center of any “best practice.” They are professionals who understand reading, language, and learning and use that information to develop a coherent, articulate framework for teaching reading. Knowledgeable teachers are those who continually measure their practice against an explicit theoretical base.

A deep understanding of the complexities of reading happens over time as teachers engage in their own research, read and talk with colleagues about current theories and classroom-based studies, experiment and refine instructional procedures, and reflect on their own literacy uses and transformations. These experiences enrich daily life.

12. Reading is a lifelong process.

Readers hone their skills each time they encounter an unfamiliar text or material for which they have little background. Developing a proficient reader takes a lifetime. While strategies critical to successful reading have been identified, these strategies vary in their orchestration as contexts, texts, and purposes vary. Readers can only learn the authentic uses of these strategies when they attempt to use them for real, personal reasons. Paulo Freire reminds us that reading is, ultimately, learning, knowledge, and action that make a difference (1970).

<http://www.ncte.org/readinit/overview-new.htm>

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